

Teaching Old Buildings New Tricks

Once a hub for barge traffic on the Missouri River and known as the home of Arbor Day, Nebraska City in Otoe County, Nebraska, features many historically significant buildings. To encourage energy efficiency and historic preservation of these buildings, Otoe County joined the Rebuild America program in 1998.

"We have a large number of beautiful historic buildings, but building owners were finding the energy costs—especially for heating—very high," said Amy Reese, Rebuild Otoe County Program Coordinator. "In some cases, the upper stories of buildings on Main Street here in Nebraska City were boarded up in an attempt to control heating costs. We wanted to see those buildings opened up and fully used as a way of revitalizing the downtown."

Rebuild Otoe County was developed as a part of the state's Rebuild Nebraska program. It was made possible through a \$100,000 Special Projects grant awarded to the Nebraska Energy Office from the U.S. Department of Energy in 1998. The Energy Office and the River County Economic Development Corporation worked together to provide the energy-efficiency and historic preservation opportunity for building owners in Otoe County.

Inspections Only the First Step

Rebuild Otoe County focuses on commercial and multi-family buildings listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Buildings. As of September 2000, there were 37 building partners voluntarily participating in

the partnership. As partners, these building owners receive free energy audit reports, an onsite explanation of the audit findings that includes recommendations about potential energy-efficiency improvements, information on various financing options, access to low-interest financing, and free technical recommendations on historic preservation opportunities.

Nebraska Municipal Power Pool (NMPP) Energy and Nebraska City Utilities are the electric utility partners for Rebuild Otoe County. Tim Sutherland of NMPP Energy walks through the buildings with the owners and the local coordinator looking for opportunities to save energy. He focuses on insulation, the building envelope, windows, and



The Bischof Hardware building was built in late 1870. It is the oldest existing retail building in Nebraska City. Currently unoccupied, the owners Oliver and Jeannette Pearly are turning the building into a restaurant.

PARTNERSHIP FACTS:

- **Targeted Buildings:**
Museums, Civil War structures, older multi-family buildings and commercial projects
- **Total Building Area Committed:**
Over 230,000 square feet
- **Benefits:**
Revitalized downtown area, preservation of significant historic structures and reduced energy use and costs
- **New and Notable Innovations:**
Emphasis on buildings listed on, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Buildings

heating and cooling systems. While pointing out potential improvements during these inspections, Sutherland prepares a written audit report of his findings, along with an analysis of potential savings. The building owners also receive information on various financing options, including information from the Nebraska Energy Office about loans available at 5 percent interest through their Dollar and Energy Saving Loan Program.

Fix It—Gently

Rebuild Otoe County building partners also receive no-cost technical assistance and advice from architects, builders and other professionals who can help put energy-efficiency recommendations into place without disturbing the historical integrity of the building. “The partnership is still recruiting new building sites and working with current partners to see their improvements are made so that energy savings can be achieved,” according to Reese.

Several building owners have made improvements or are in various stages of the planning and financing process. For example, Jerry and Diane Bender joined the program to reduce utility costs in their downtown building. After making several of the improvements recommended in the energy audit report, the annual energy costs for their building have been reduced by 27 percent.

Range of Ages

Buildings in the partnership range from 50 years old to more than 100 years old. Several are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings, including the Grand Army of

the Republic Hall, now a Civil War museum, and the Burlington Northern Train Depot, which is being rehabilitated to house local businesses. “We work closely with the Nebraska State Historical Society to assure that energy efficiency and historic preservation are both taken into consideration when owners make improvements on their buildings,” said Reese.



The Grand Army of the Republic Hall is one of several downtown buildings in Nebraska City voluntarily participating in the Rebuild Otoe County Program.

Community Benefits

“Rebuild Otoe County has allowed people to stay in buildings that would otherwise be vacated and destroyed because of high energy costs,” said Leroy Frana, Manager of Nebraska City Utilities.

“We have a goal of renovating 40 buildings for the life of the program,” said Reese. “We consider the work we’ve done so far incredibly successful.”

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT REBUILD OTOE COUNTY, CONTACT:

Amy Reese, Program Coordinator
Rebuild Otoe County
806 First Avenue • Nebraska City, NE • 68410
Phone: (402) 873-4262
Email: Rebuild@alltel.net

Visit the Rebuild America Web site at: www.rebuild.org
Or call the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Clearinghouse at: 1-800-DOE-3732

